

Spring Break by Glitter_Bug

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Summary:

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Billy cuts him off, "They don't even like you anymore."

"And you think they like you?" Steve shoots back, instantly defensive, "They stuck you with me, remember. We're *both* the butt of this particular joke."

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Spring Break

Author's Note:

This is written for the [HarringroveApril](#) challenge I co-created with Mono on Twitter!
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Spring Break means one thing, and one thing only to the older members of any Hawkins sports team.

The annual visit to the Lake House.

It's exactly as the incredibly unimaginative name suggests. A sprawling place a half-day drive away, perched on the edge of an equally sprawling lake, bequeathed by some now-forgotten Hawkins alum to the sports department and used ever since as a place for the oldest boys to gather, swim, drink and let loose somewhere far away enough to feel free, but close enough for overbearing parents not to worry.

Steve went last year, and had such a good time that he hardly remembers much of it. He remembers alcohol- lots of it- and seeing far too much of Tommy's freckled ass when the poker night turned into strip poker night and then into skinny dipping. He remembers laughing loudly into the night, remembers friends, bonfires, waking up early to go for a sunrise swim, followed by shitty attempts at breakfasts made by hungover guys with minimal cooking experience.

He remembers having fun.

Steve's not sure that this year's trip is going to be the same. He's not exactly friends with the guys anymore, and he's only hanging onto his position on the team by a thread, well aware that it's more to do with the previous generous donations of gym equipment and rather large checks from his parents, rather than any of his own sporting talent, but he *is* still on the team, so he *is* entitled to a place on the trip, and he *is* going to take it.

The whole team waits around after the last practice before the break as Daniel Matterson, captain of the football team, stands at the front of the locker room, breathing through his mouth against the stench of sweat, damp and far too much cheap body spray, waving a clipboard

and reeling off groups of names to a chorus or cheers or groans, depending how the allocations have fallen.

"Clark and Johnson, you're with Logan and Preston. Got you guys on barbecue duty so don't forget the meat, OK?"

There's a whoop from a corner of the room, as the four friends high five, and Matterson nods, tapping his pencil down the list of names already crossed off on his sheet, "So that just leaves...er...Hargrove and Harrington," he grins as he looks up, "We kinda ran out of room, so we figured you two could go together?"

There's a hush across the locker room, all murmured conversations stopping as all eyes turn to look between Steve and Billy, the latter of whom is leaning against the wall, a posture that was, of five seconds ago, the very picture of overt nonchalance.

"And how *exactly* did you figure that?" Billy growls, hands already forming into fists as he pushes himself upright.

There's a murmur of excuses from the other guys,
"Drew straws."

"Names from a hat."

"Alphabetical"

There's a beat of silence, and then someone pipes up,
"...thought it'd be funny."

Steve still frozen, still processing, but Billy surges forward with a yell, poking his finger right into Matterson's broad chest,

"Funny? Yeah? Spring break? I'll break your fucking neck." Matterson takes a step back, and Billy crowds him even more, "Someone's gonna swap. You are gonna get someone to swap. I don't care who. *Anyone*."

Steve feels a pang at that, at how desperate Hargrove is to be away from him, but it's overshadowed by the silence from the rest of the team. The way they look at hands and feet that have suddenly become the most interesting thing in the room. The way no one clamours, no one volunteers.

It's not exactly a surprise. Steve had noticed that Billy never quite became the King that Tommy insisted he was going to be. He'd muscled Steve out of the throne, but had never actually been able to take it for himself. He came from the wrong part of town, he picked one fight too many, he tried to put the moves on too many guys' girlfriends. Steve's not exactly sure what went wrong but he knew that, while Billy was fun to invite to a party, fun to wind up and let go, he wasn't a friend.

Wasn't a team player. Wasn't a leader. Wasn't the King.

And Steve had heard the newest whispers. The rumours. The nods at his earring and his clothes and how none of his flirtations had actually gone further than a show of frenching at a party.

The words, one in particular, hissed behind his back.

He gets why the two of them were lumped together.

The tension in the room grows. And Steve can feel his face heating up with second hand embarrassment. He can see the way Billy's jaw twitches, the way he squares his shoulders, and Steve knows what's coming. Part of him wants to let it happen, to stand back as Billy goes wild, maybe get a bit of satisfaction from watching Matterson and his friends finally put him in his place. But there's another part of him that remembers being on the receiving end of Hargrove's fists, a part that's seen enough anger and violence from the boy to last a lifetime, and that's the part that steps forward,

"C'mon, man." He has a hand on Billy's back, making contact before he's even thinking. He regrets the action as soon as Billy whirls round, eyes blazing with fury, but he pushes through anyway. Thinks about calming down a beer-fuelled Tommy whenever some guy allegedly makes eyes at Carol. Keeps his voice soft and low, "It's just a drive and a room. We don't...don't even have to talk, OK?"

He's as surprised as the rest of them when it works. When Billy lets out his breath in a huff and takes his finger away from Matterson and wipes it on Steve's shirt instead,

"Damn right we won't talk, Harrington. Won't even look at each other. And we're taking my car."

He storms out of the locker room, and Steve hovers awkwardly for a moment, as the chatter grows around him, becomes *about* him but

never actually includes him.

As soon as he's sure that Billy will be far enough away, Steve slips out of the door too.

The drive starts out as awkward as Steve had expected.

As soon as he was in the car, Billy had turned up the radio and snapped at Steve not to say a word, before reversing out of the driveway with far too much speed and far too few glances in the mirror.

But at least Billy came. He pulled up outside Steve's house at ass o'clock and blasted the horn and didn't drive away until Steve had most of his body in the passenger seat and his door part way closed. And that's gotta be worth something.

So Steve tries.

He doesn't complain when Billy roars away before he's even got his seatbelt on. He doesn't grouse about the music or point out the missed stop signs or red lights and he doesn't even say a word when Billy takes the wrong exit.

The last one is a choice that comes back to bite him in the ass an hour later, when they're pulled over at the side of the road with Billy glaring daggers at the map spread across the hood of the Camaro.

Steve waits for him to figure it out. Waits out five minutes of spitting and swearing and Billy angrily kicking at the dust by the roadside before he hesitantly points out the route they should have taken, and Billy stares down at his finger, jaw clicking when he opens his mouth.

"You knew?" he growls, knocking Steve's hand away and double checking the route for himself, "Why the fuck didn't you say anything?" he sounds exasperated, rather than angry, and Steve can't keep the attitude from his tone,

"Maybe cause you told me not to talk."

Billy slams his fist down on the hood, crumpling the map, "Always so damn obedient, are you? Such a good boy now."

Steve doesn't even flinch. Just rolls his eyes and holds out a hand, "Yelling at me isn't gonna get us un-lost. Just let me. Let me look."

Billy passes the map over with a sigh, frowning as Steve hums and traces a route with his finger,

"Ok. Ok," Steve rests the map back against the hood, "I think I've got it. We're not...far out. Just went a bit...scenic? We can carry on down here-" he drags his finger along one of the lines, "and...no wait, that's...that might be a river? So we need to, uh..."

He pulls his finger back, searching again and ignoring the way Billy's tapping his foot, "yeah, here. It'll take a little bit longer, maybe a half hour, but with the way you drive-" he grins, "we'll probably still get there before them."

Steve's navigation gets them mostly back on track, his chosen route taking them through a town not much bigger or brighter than Hawkins but with the star attraction of some fifties-style diner. Steve sees the billboard for it just before they pass it, a pretty blonde in a low-cut gingham dress, serving up a tower of glistening pancakes and a frothy pink milkshake.

As if on cue, his stomach grumbles, an embarrassing reminder that Billy's blasting horn had interrupted his Cheerios. He catches the sideways glance Billy throws his way, and then the car's lurching, Billy twisting the wheel in a U-Turn and screeching into the parking lot, slamming the brakes on when he's beside some bright pink Cadillac displaying a Specials Menu.

"What?" Billy grunts in response to Steve's eyebrow raise, "m hungry."

Steve waits until they're seated, until the overly-friendly waitress has dropped off some menus and brought over coffee before he offers out a suggestion, a plan for the two of them to move forward. To get through the week as unscathed as they can.

"Look, Hargrove. This is dumb, OK. We're stuck together, right? We can at least be...civil?"

"Civil?" Billy plucks at the peeling laminate on the table with a thumbnail, spitting the word out and Steve ignores his tone,

"Yeah like, polite and shit? We don't have to be best friends but we can, we can still talk. Small talk."

"Such lovely weather we're having," Billy puts on a plummy voice gesturing at the cloudy sky outside, the raindrops already splattering the windows, and Steve huffs,

"You know what I mean."

"You mean you want a truce." Billy's looking up at him now, wrinkling his brow.

"A truce?" Steve hadn't expected Billy to give in so easily. But Billy takes his surprise for confusion and sneers,

"Yeah, dipshit, It means a temporary agreement to stop-"

Steve kicks him under the table, just a tap of his Nike against Billy's boot, and Billy's jolts his foot back as if it actually hurt. Steve leaves his foot in the now-vacated space, one leg stretched out, "I fucking know what a truce means. I'm just surprised you do. Want one, that is."

He watches as Billy worries at the laminate again, "Well...you're right. We are stuck together. Might as well make it suck a little less ass if we can."

"...Thanks?" Steve's saved from having to say any more when the waitress swings by for their orders. She heads straight for Billy, leaning a little too close when she refills his coffee and then spends an age asking him all sorts of simpering questions about where he's from, what he's doing all the way out here, just *how* did he get those curls so shiny? But eventually she gets round to asking for his order, and Billy leans past her ample bosom to stare straight at Steve, "You paying?"

Steve grits his teeth. Thinks about being the bigger person. Thinks about how Billy hadn't asked for gas money. He nods, "Sure."

Billy licks his lips, "Then I'll have the steak. Medium-rare," Billy grins at the waitress who giggles, turning to walk to the kitchen before remembering Steve at the last minute and spinning on her heels.

--

They eat in silence. The atmosphere still just as awkward as in the car. Steve takes three bites of pancake. Washes it down with some scalding coffee. He thinks about five different conversation starters, opens his mouth and then thinks about how Billy will find a way to ridicule him for them. He shuts his mouth again. Eats more pancake. The silence grows. Nothing but the 50s crooners on the jukebox and the squeal of cutlery as Billy saws at his too tough, too cooked steak with a blunt knife.

Steve swallows down his hesitation along with some more pancake and attempts a conversation,
"So, you looking forward to-"

"Why are you even coming, Steve?" Billy speaks over him, and Steve is taken aback at the ice in his tone. He flounders, gesturing in the air with his fork,

"It's, uh, the team. A tradition. They always-"

Billy cuts him off, "They don't even like you anymore."

"And you think they like *you* ?" Steve shoots back, instantly defensive, "They stuck you with me, remember. We're *both* the butt of this particular joke."

Billy's mouth opens. Closes. His fist clenches around his fork and then he lets it clatter to the table.

But Steve isn't done. Billy opened this particular can of worms. He can deal with the wiggliest of the fuckers.

"You were a novelty, Billy. All shiny and new and from *California*. Of course they were gonna love you at first. But what have you done to keep them interested, eh? Cause from what I've heard, Matterson's

the one throwing the parties. He's the one dating Cindy Martin. He's the one the scout spotted at the last match. The football team are the ones winning all the games now."

Steve takes another gulp of coffee. Forces it down even when it burns, "He took your throne, Hargrove, and you didn't even see it coming. Least I gave my crown away willingly."

Steve knows he should stop there. Knows the next step is a line that he shouldn't cross. More than just salt in the wound, it's acid. Harsh and biting and irreversible.

But a part of him remembers the fight. The scar on his hairline. The braying from Tommy and his other 'friends' whenever Billy knocked Steve on his ass at practice.

He looks at Billy. Silent, staring down at his plate and chewing angrily at the chunk of steak in his mouth.

And it's so easy to strike the final blow that Steve can't hold back,

"Least they never called me a fag."

The word tastes like ash on his tongue, and Steve feels sick as soon as he hears himself say it, regret flooding his stomach. Billy rises suddenly, and Steve braces for a hit. *Well deserved*, he thinks. But Billy doesn't even say a word, shoving his chair back so suddenly that it falls back with a bang. And then he turns. Storms out with his car keys already in hand.

Steve reacts instantly. He's up, dropping a wad of bills on the table, and jogging to catch up with Billy outside the diner.

"Billy?"

"Fuck off , Harrington."

Billy keeps his face turned away, but Steve hears the waver in his voice.

"Shit. Billy. I'm sorry. I'm...that was. Really shitty. Of me."

"Fuck. Off."

He turns then. Teeth bared in a grimace and one hand raised in a fist,

but Steve can see the shimmer of wetness in his eyes. The hurt there. Sees it all before Billy covers it all up with anger, "I'm gonna count to one, Harrington. Walk away."

Steve's not even thinking about how he's going to be stranded out here. Not even worrying about how he can get home. All he can think about is the way that Billy's voice cracked on that last word.

"Thought we had a truce," Steve tries. And it's pathetic, because *he's* the one who broke it. Shattered it within minutes. But it's enough to give Billy pause, to throw him off his stride, and Steve hurriedly keeps going, "They might've called me... that too." He knows that it's a shit attempt at an apology, an explanation, but he wants to try, "Behind my back. I don't...I don't know."

"Nah, they never," Billy drops his fist, shaking his head, "Pussy, bitch, loser," he reels them off in a bored voice, counting on his fingers, "spaz-"

Steve rolls his eyes, "Ok, ok, that-"

"Pathetic, lameass and, uh, warped. Perv. When they saw you with that dweeby kid, I guess. But no." Billy drops his eyes, "Not fag. Never that one."

Steve cringes at the word, and the other insults echo in his ears. It's not like he didn't know. But still. It hurts. He fakes a smile, "Zero points for creativity, I guess. And, uh, yours. The...what they say. 's not like it means anything though, right? Not like they're actually saying *Hargrove likes boys* . You don't...it's just something, right? A word? Cause of, I dunno. The California thing? The hair and the earring?"

Steve knows he's rambling, and he can't tell from the look on Billy's face if he's about to smile or cry or put his fist through Steve's nose, so he ploughs on, "And anyway, you like girls, yeah? I heard you slept with Kimmie Morris *and* Tara Rosenbaum on like, your first week here. And Barry said that you went on a date with Eddie's sister? So you can't be, y'know? Can you?"

"Funny what you hear," Billy shrugs, "Don't think I've even met Eddie's sister."

He turns away, "Words means what they mean, Harrington."

It's not a confession. Not exactly. But it shuts Steve up instantly as he tries to figure it out. To work out if Billy's saying what he might be saying.

"Don't think too hard on it," Billy pats his shoulder, "C'mon. We should get going."

But Steve finds that he can't help thinking about it.

About whether Billy... *is*.

About what it means and why it matters. If it matters.

Steve can't quite see that it does.

He thinks about it. *Really* thinks about it. Thinks about him and Tommy when they were eleven, on the couch in Tommy's rec room, talking about girls and kissing. Talking about how to know if you're gonna be any good. How to make sure you don't suck at it for your first one. Thinks about Tommy's lips and his tongue and how it didn't count. Not for practice. Not with each other.

He thinks about watching Grease with Nancy. About Danny's hips and Sandy's catsuit and how he got the same kind of thrill from both. How he tried to pretend he just wanted to *be* Danny, got himself a leather jacket and slicked his hair back, but how it never quite scratched that itch.

He thinks about Billy. About how he has to force himself not to stare whenever Billy plays skins. About firm muscle and shining skin and thick thighs and-

"All outta small talk already?" Billy's teasing lilt jolts him from his thoughts, and Steve *knows* he's flushing red, "or that head so big and empty you get lost in there?"

"Nice weather we're having," Steve riffs, copying Billy's tone from earlier, "But. No. I, uh. I was thinking about the...what I said. What the guys have been saying."

Billy sighs. Long and drawn out and full of tension, "And you don't

wanna room with me," the words come out slowly through gritted teeth, "In case? I dunno, Harrington. In case I can't keep my faggy hands to myself. In case I can't help but peep at you in the shower? In case-"

Billy's voice is getting louder, faster, and Steve holds up his hands in surrender,

"Shit! Stop it. No. No!"

But Billy's on a roll now, venom spewing out, "Best sleep in the bathroom and lock the door, Steve, cause I won't be able to hold back, will I? Soon as you're asleep I'm gonna pull your shorts down and just fucking suck you dry. Stick it in you. Cause we can't help it, can we? We're sick in the head. We're-"

Steve's frantic pleas must finally break through, and Billy stops himself, panting heavily.

"Stop the car, Billy," Steve orders. Billy starts to protest, but Steve stays firm, "Stop the car. Pull over now."

They do. It's a good job. Billy's trembling from head to toe, a shiver that has his teeth chattering until he clenches his jaw, and there are tears in his eyes. Steve looks away as he wipes them. Waits until they both have their breath back under control. He jumps when Billy thumps his head down onto the steering wheel, jumps again when Billy repeats the motion- harder this time, and then just lets his head stay there. He's still shaking, his fingers digging hard into his knees, and Steve reaches out a hand. Slow and gentle. Rests it on Billy's tense shoulder and keeps it there when Billy doesn't flinch away. Only pulls away when Billy's stopped shuddering.

"Billy. Look. I shouldn't have said...because I don't...I don't mind. I really don't mind. I...there's a kid. Not...not Dustin. I probably. I probably shouldn't say who, right? But he's...I think he's...well his *Mom* thinks..."

Steve stops. Breathes. Looks up to see Billy's head turned towards him, forehead still pressing against the wheel, but a look of slight amusement crossing his face. Steve continues,

"He might be...queer? Is that? Gay? Whatever. But he's...he's good and he's kind and he's the bravest little fucker I've met so...it doesn't matter, does it? Really? If he is. And, ok, maybe it's a bit different with you cause, well, you're an asshole-" Steve looks up, a little guiltily, but now Billy's smiling, a smug smirk, and he sits up to nod in agreement,

"That I am,"

"That you are," Steve grins back, trying to ignore the red mark on Billy's forehead, "But...if you are. Gay? Then that shouldn't matter. Shouldn't be a bad thing."

"Not when there's so many other bad things about me to choose from?" The humour in Billy's tone is obvious, and Steve chuckles, "Exactly."

Billy shakes his head,

"Man, Harrington, you certainly know how to give the world's worst fucking apology."

He drags the heels of his hands across his eyes and lets out a shuddering breath, "But thank you. I think. And fuck you too."

The rest of the small talk is easier. Lighter. Slightly less insulting. They do end up talking about the weather, and the lake house, and how many beers it'll take before Tommy's suggesting skinny dipping. They talk about movies and music and television, finding a surprising amount of common ground and getting far too animated when they somehow stumble on to the topic of Dynasty, Billy insisting that it was all drawn from Steve's life, "*Steven Carrington? Fucking pretty preppy boy with Daddy issues? Come on!*" while Steve tries to deny ever actually seeing a whole episode, insisting he only caught a glimpse when his Mom was watching, yet somehow knowing exactly all the plot points and references that Billy makes.

It's almost like being friends. And, with the April shower ceasing and the sun starting to break through the clouds, Steve thinks he might end up enjoying the journey. Might even have a fun trip after all.

Eventually, the small talk gets a little bigger. Steve notices when it starts to get personal, when he starts to learn about Billy as much from what he doesn't say as from what he does. Like when the conversation veers towards parents and Billy immediately steers it right back. When Steve makes a joke about Billy's plans for college and Billy says, "Didn't think I'd really get this far," with a grin that doesn't meet his eyes. When he starts asking about California, about Billy's friends back home, slipping up and saying, "so did you have a girlf- a...a someone special?" and then cringing at how he sounds just like his grandma. But Billy just nods. Once. Lips set in a straight line. So Steve just asks if he misses the heat. The sun.

"Every fucking day, man." Billy murmurs, and Steve knows Billy's not just talking about the weather, "But I guess it can get kinda sunny here too."

There's something about the way he says it. The way he glances over for a moment, that has Steve's stomach fluttering pleasantly.

They stop at a gas station a few hours later, taking turns in the gross bathroom, before heading into the store, loading themselves up with chips and candy and soda, Billy getting distracted by a display of flyers for local tourist attractions, and then creasing up laughing at both Steve and the cashier when they call the soda 'pop'. They're just heading out, arms laden with bags and boxes, when Billy pats his jacket pocket, pulling out an almost empty box of Marlboros, "Oh, shit, I'm outta smokes," He reaches into his other pocket, pulling out the Camaro's keys and jiggling them in the air, "Here, you wanna drive the next leg?"

He throws the keys through the air, and Steve catches them one handed, mouth gaping at the casual ease in which Billy has offered up the car, watching for a moment as Billy strides into the shop, before he slips eagerly into the Camaro, shoving the driver's seat back a few inches and tapping his foot experimentally against the pedals. The car has him sitting a little lower than in his Beemer, and the slight change of position makes him feel like a kid again, sitting in his Dad's car on the driveway, feet dangling and needing a stack of cushions and phonebooks before he could even see over the windscreen. He doesn't quite make a 'vroom vroom' noise but...it's

close.

When Billy gets back in the car, unlit cigarette already in his mouth, he's clutching a handful of flyers snatched from the display. He waves them in the air, "Want to have some fun? Some of these are pretty close." He passes one over, some thirty-foot statue of a snowboarding turtle which Steve is almost certain he's visited before. He can picture a photo in one of his parent's albums, him and his Mom posing in front of it, both squinting into the sun.

"Seriously?" Steve hands the flyer back, "I think I did most of these with my parents when I was, like, five."

"Yeah, seriously," Billy shoves another in Steve's face, "I wanna see the world's biggest hammer."

Steve can't help but smirk, "I've already seen the world's biggest tool, he's sitting right-"

Billy smacks him hard in the arm, but he's grinning,

"I mean it. You wanna do it? Blow off those idiots and just do our own thing? Go see all this tacky shit?" Billy taps Steve's face with the fan of flyers and Steve brushes them away,

"This still part of the truce?"

"Obviously," Billy nods. "No fighting until we've gone to see 'em all."

Steve looks at the variety of attractions spread out on Billy's lap. Tries to stop his eyes lingering on tight denim instead of shiny paper. "We could," he muses, "I don't...I don't know if we *can* see them all though." Steve reaches over, fingers brushing Billy's thigh as he holds up the flyer for *Paul Bunyan's Fry Pan*, "This is actually in Montana. And..." he stretches over again, another light press on denim as he picks up a second poster, "the World's Oldest Ham is in Virginia. So-"

Billy doesn't even look up from the leaflets, "Gonna be a long-ass truce then, isn't it?"

Steve doesn't draw attention to the implication.

Instead he just hums, reaching into the glove box for the map and

opening it out to trace a new route with his finger,
"If you don't mind sharing a shitty motel room, we can probably afford to make a week of it."

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Billy freeze. Sees the advertisement for *The World's Largest Ball of Stamps* trembling along with Billy's hands,

But there's no sign of any nervousness, any fear, when he speaks, "Don't fancy the Hilton then, uptown boy? Not gonna splash out on the presidential suite?"

Steve shakes his head, keeps looking down at the map, the winding roads, the dead ends, the long highways taking him away from the small towns, "Nope. Not this time. You'll just have to deal with me snoring."

And with that, he pulls away. Keeps one eye on the road and the other on Billy. He watches as Billy's hands stop shaking and he relaxes. Starts looking through the attractions again, sorting some of them into a pile and screwing up the others.

Steve wonders if Billy did anything like this back home. Pictures a little kid Billy, all blond curls and gap-toothed, kneeling up with his astounded face pressed against a car window as he's driven past giant fibreglass cows or sharks or whatever they have in California. He thinks about an older, surlier, Billy, dragged across the country with his belongings piled in the back of his car. He looks over again, a quick glance that he can pass off as a mirror check, and Billy is smiling, small but real, his eyes crinkling as the corners as he reads the little blurb on the back of one of the flyers.

And maybe it'll all come back to bite him in the ass. Maybe Steve's going to be stranded next to The World's Only Corn Palace, trying to thumb a lift home. But when he looks at the genuine smile on Billy's face and compares it with the anger in the locker room, the hurt he saw outside the diner, the tears cried in the driver's seat.

Steve thinks it might be worth taking the risk.

Author's Note:

Come talk to me about Harringrove on Tumblr! I'm
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